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## White Falcons attend dedication ceremony to fallen comrade

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Members of the 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, "White Falcons," attended the David E. Hickman Plaza Naming and Dedication Ceremony in Greensboro, N.C., Aug. 16. Spc. David Hickman, a White Falcon paratrooper and Greensboro native, was the last soldier killed in the Iraq War, Nov. 14, 2011, in Baghdad. The west side of the Guilford County Governmental Plaza was named in honor of his memory.

GREENSBORO, N.C. – Many of the paratroopers slept or talked quietly with each other as the bus left Fort Bragg in the darkness of the early morning.

As the sky brightened and the weather shifted from drizzle to rain, the miles passed under the tires. Many were released from field training just hours earlier for such a special event and had had little or no rest that night.

Some hung their Army service uniforms from the windows. Others were already in uniform, paying special attention to their posture to avoid wrinkling the fabric.

The solemn and quiet bus ride to Greensboro ushered the White Falcons toward their purpose: to witness the dedication of a memorial and pay honor to their fallen brother-in-arms, Spc. David E. Hickman.

Paratroopers of the 2nd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, attended the David E. Hickman Plaza Naming and Dedication Ceremony at 301 W. Market Street in Greensboro, Aug. 16.

Hickman, a White Falcon paratrooper, was the last American soldier killed in combat in Iraq on Nov. 14, 2011, in Baghdad.

Born Jan 16, 1988, Hickman grew up in the Greensboro area, ultimately attending Northeast High School where he was an all-conference linebacker and team captain. He graduated in 2006 and then went on to attend Ferrum College in Virginia, where he had hoped to play Division 3 football. He decided to enlist in 2009 as an infantryman.

Family and friends remember his physique and fitness, mentioning his award of a black belt in taekwondo and the time he devoted to the gym.

“He was a beast of a man,” said Staff Sgt. Eric Brown, a White Falcon comrade, with a smile. “Every time I passed Hickman, I’d say, ‘You’re getting small,’ and he’d flex and then I’d feel bad about myself.”

Hickman was also a newlywed, having married his wife, Calli, after joining the Army.

He deployed to Iraq in May, 2011 and was stationed at Joint Security Station Muthana. He was 23 when he was killed that November by a roadside bomb in Baghdad.

He had been scheduled to return to Fort Bragg the following month. By this time, the war in Iraq had produced more than 4,800 coalition deaths. Hickman’s death was the last due

to combat action.

His body returned to Greensboro that Thanksgiving and his funeral services were held on Nov. 26. He received the Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart for his sacrifice and was laid to rest in Lakeview Memorial Park Cemetery. The passage of time has done little to diminish the feelings of loss for Hickman's family and friends.

"I wish he were still here in my squad as one of my team leaders," said Brown. "I miss him."

The paratroopers stepped off of the bus in downtown Greensboro and gathered at the Guilford County Governmental Plaza as setup for the ceremony on the west side was beginning. The east side of the plaza had been named before in honor of those that had given their lives in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

As the plaza dedication ceremony began, Brown expertly led the formation of 28 White Falcon paratroopers to stand beside the seated attendees.

They witnessed the naming of the west end of the plaza in honor of Hickman and the memorialization of the community's other soldiers that were killed in action throughout the global war on terror.

The paratroopers saluted as the American flag was presented by the Guilford County Sheriff's Honor Guard and again as the "Star-Spangled Banner" was sung by a member of the Hickman family's church, the New Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

They prayed alongside Hickman's family and friends as the church's the Rev. William F. Wright Jr. delivered the invocation. After the prayer, the plaintive notes of "Amazing Grace" filled the air as a Fork Union Military Academy member played the traditional bagpipes.

Hickman's family and community leaders then cut the blue ribbon, ceremoniously revealing the plaza's new name. All present then witnessed the unveiling of a monument listing the 13 names of the county's fallen service members.

"It is our duty as Americans, to honor those heroic members of the armed forces who have served during the war and have lost their lives in the defense of our country or in the pursuit of our nation's ideals of democracy," said County Commissioner Alan Branson, as he read aloud the resolution for the monument. "It is imperative that we remember the selflessness and heroism of all who serve in the armed forces."

Those closest to Hickman appreciated the tribute to their loved one.

"You feel a lot of things when you read those names," said Logan Trainum, Hickman's close friend. "It's our duty to convey what the price is to people who don't know."

A three-volley salute and the playing of taps followed the proclamation and unveiling. Several friends and family members of Hickman and those of the county's other fallen service members also spoke to the attendees, adding to the poignancy of the ceremony with anecdotes and memories.

Afterwards, Hickman's comrades gathered at a nearby restaurant to share a meal and a toast to their friend. Then they got back on board their bus and began the two-hour drive back to Fort Bragg.

On the way home, Sgt. Samuel Johnson, a medic assigned to 2-325th AIR shared a favorite memory of Hickman. He smiled as he described the powerful Hickman's assault on a punching bag that had been set up outside the troops' living quarters in Iraq.

"He said to me, 'Doc, want to see something funny?' Then he jumped up about three feet in the air, did a spin kick and knocked the thing over," Johnson said.

“I didn’t know where it came from,” he added, laughing softly. “He was such a quiet guy.”

The other paratroopers on the bus listened and nodded as Johnson concluded, “He’s the strongest person I’ve ever met. Not just physically, but mentally. It was his whole demeanor. He really is an American hero and he and his family deserves everything they gave him today.”